

The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.



Photo courtesy of East Cullman Baptist Association

Teresa Foust (left), a member of the East Cullman Baptist Association WMU leadership team, and her granddaughter, Bailey, organize supplies for the Jack and Jill ministry.

Lending a hand

East Cullman Association ministry offers help to school children in need

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Some days you need a little extra help. That goes for adults, but it goes for children and teens also, said Debbie Keaton, ministry associate at East Cullman Baptist Association. About three years ago, she and other members of the association's Woman's Missionary Union leadership team started hear-

ing about needs students in their area have on a regular basis.

"One of the guidance counselors at a local school told me she kept a counselor's closet with toothpaste, toothbrushes and other things, that way students could just come by and pick items up," Keaton said.

Debbie Nail, ECBA WMU/women's ministry director, said the team also realized students sometimes need a change of clothes at school.

"We were talking about needs that children have and how parents are not always able and available to run to school and take a change of clothes," said Nail, a member of Northbrook Baptist Church in Cullman. "We thought that would be a good possibility for a ministry for our whole community."

So they sent out questionnaires to the counselors at all the schools within the local area of ECBA, and

the response was positive, especially from the schools in low socioeconomic areas, Nail said.

From there, the Jack and Jill Ministry was born.

This school year, they've supplied 10 schools with various items, and they keep the shelves stocked at the ECBA office for needs that might come up during the year.

For more information, visit ecba316.org/jack-jill-ministry.

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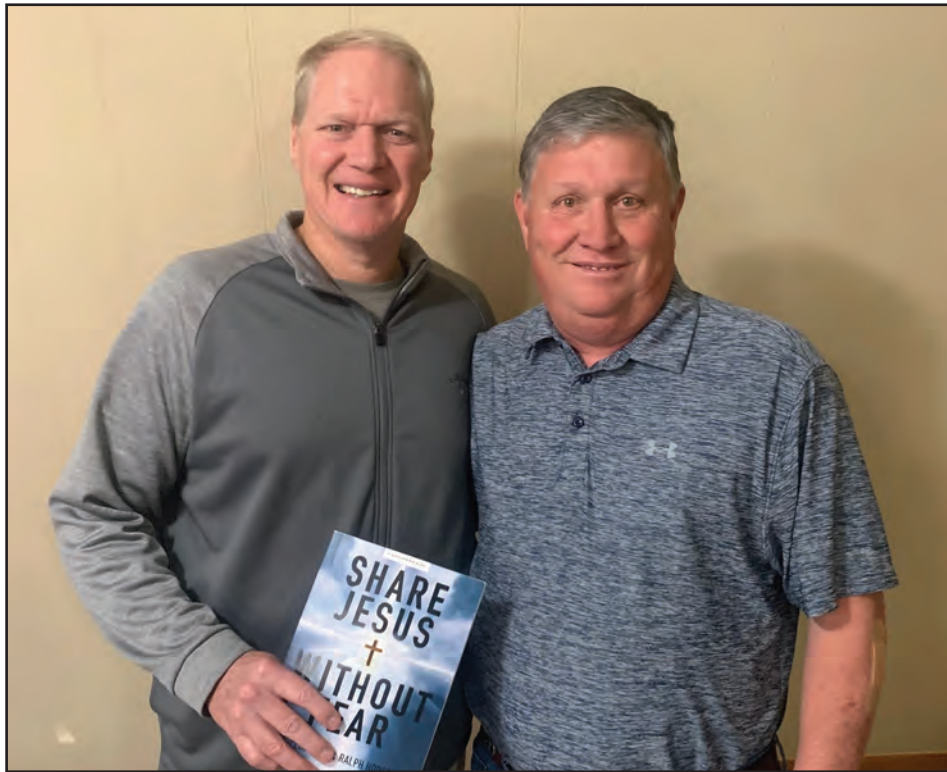


Photo courtesy of Shane Stidham
Shane Stidham (left), pastor of Fulton Bridge Baptist Church in Hamilton, and Jeff Pugh, outreach leader, are working to continue growing the church's evangelism efforts.

Pastor boosts church's evangelism with seminary homework

What happens when the pastor brings his homework to church? What if that homework assignment involves evangelism?

Shane Stidham, pastor of Fulton Bridge Baptist Church, Hamilton, knew his first reading assignment as a Leavell College student and a Caskey Center scholarship recipient was something his church members needed to do, as well.

The assignment was Ralph Hodge and William Fay's book, "Share Jesus Without Fear." The book approaches evangelism by starting conversations with five specific questions that move the conversation toward the gospel.

"It is such an easy way to share," Stidham said.

Visible growth

New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary's Caskey Center provides full-tuition scholarships for qualified students who serve on a church staff. The scholarship requires students to share the gospel weekly.

As Stidham led his members to read and implement the book, members saw more than a dozen people come to faith in Christ in one year.

In the town of 7,000, the church grew from about 55 on Sunday mornings to around 180 in worship.

"I believe with all my heart that our faithfulness to share Jesus without fear is the reason that God has blessed our church in such a powerful way," Stidham said.

While the church had long been active in the community through its food distribution program and other ministries, its evangelistic outreach needed a boost. Using this approach proved effective.

'Very beneficial'

"I can't explain what this little-bitty book has done for us," Stidham said. "It's been very beneficial to us."

Serving in his first church as pastor, Stidham praised Blake Newsom, Caskey Center director and associate professor of expository preaching, for Newsom's encouragement and guidance to him as a new pastor.

A trained cardiac and vascular ultrasound technician, Stidham serves bivocationally but takes every opportunity to build relationships for the gospel. While being a pastor was not necessarily part of his plans years ago, Stidham said he can't think of doing anything else. Stidham is quick to credit his wife, Kim, for her contributions to the church and to every part of his ministry. (New Orleans Seminary)

The Alabama Baptist

"If ye continue in My word, then ... ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:31-32

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The crossword puzzle can be found on page 15.



Rashional Thoughts

By Jennifer Davis Rash
President and Editor-in-Chief

 jrash@thealabamabaptist.org

 @RashionalThts

We can make things better if we all commit to the effort

The Jan. 3 article published by Religion News Service caught my attention with the headline, “Taylor University awarded \$30 million to revitalize local community.”

My mind chased multiple ideas before I ever read the first word of the article. I began dreaming about how the money could be put to good use.

What if one of our Alabama Baptist organizations, associations or churches were handed \$30 million to improve the community around us?

Where would we start? What would be our priorities for how to spend the money as we worked to make things better?

‘Unique calling’

I’ve always joked that if someone would provide the funds, I would be more than glad to determine how best to spend them.

But for Taylor University president Michael Lindsay, it’s a reality.

The evangelical institution about an hour northeast of In-

dianapolis announced receiving the grant Jan. 2. It is funded by Lilly Endowment as part of its College and Community Collaboration initiative, according to the RNS article.

“For us, this is about much more than economic and community development; it’s about living into our unique calling as a place that seeks to honor God in all things,” Lindsay shared with RNS via email.

Located in rural Upland, Indiana, the campus stands out amid the town’s 3 square miles. Main Street, the mile stretch connecting campus and downtown, features cracked sidewalks, poor lighting and potholed roads, RNS reported.

Taylor University’s Main Street Mile Initiative will incorporate a variety of upgrades, bring in new dining and retail outlets and partner with an advisory board of Upland residents in the effort.

“We believe Taylor and Upland have the potential to become a national model for how a small university with an engaged community can work together for significant economic and community development,”

Lindsay shared with RNS, noting they were inspired by Notre Dame’s similar efforts over the past 20-plus years in South Bend.

Lindsay added that the university’s Christian faith compels it to “seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which you have been carried,” in reference to Jeremiah 29.

Serving our communities

Our Alabama Baptist schools also have historically worked to partner with the communities around them as well as with churches throughout the state.

Samford University president Beck Taylor frequently emphasizes the importance of enhancing not only its Homewood community but also the full scope of metro Birmingham.

Down near the coast, University of Mobile president Lonnie Burnett also seeks to be a strong community asset for the town of Saraland as well as the greater Mobile area.

Judson College leaders also cared deeply about the people of Marion and surrounding

Perry County. Before the school closed in 2021, presidents Mark Tew and David Potts before him enthusiastically led students, faculty and staff in the annual Marion Matters day of service to the community.

Many churches and associations throughout our state find similar ways to serve and to be a resource for the greatest needs around them.

For example, the churches and WMU groups of East Cullman Association have come together to meet a specific need in their area. Check out the story on page 1.

Millions of dollars to spend in resourcing our communities would certainly let us do more and move faster, but we all can still do something to make things better where we live and everywhere we go.

It merely takes awareness of our surroundings, a generous spirit, openness to the Lord’s leading and a little creativity.

And in all reality, it starts with each of us as individuals. What’s one decision I can make today that will improve life for those around me?

Your Voice



Share your comments, letters to the editor, blog excerpts, social media posts

Are we in any way disgracing or mishandling God's grace?

By David L. Chancey

Fayetteville, Georgia

The great evangelist D.L. Moody loved to study his Bible, and he realized one day that he had never tackled the topic of grace. He took a day and did a Bible study on God's grace. A second day was required, and then a third.

By the afternoon of the third day, Moody was so filled with the idea of God's grace that he had to go out on the street and talk to someone about it.

Moody stopped the first person he saw, a complete stranger, and said, "My friend, do you have any understanding of grace?"

The man replied, "Sir, I've been married to her for over 30 years, and I still don't understand her!"

God's grace is a subject so big it catches us by surprise. The Scottish pastor G. Campbell Morgan once said the most beautiful word in our language is grace.

One newspaper column will not even scratch the surface of this wonderful attribute of God.

What is grace? The free, spontaneous, unmerited favor of God for sinful people. The word describes man's poverty and God's kindness. The Greek word is *charis*, which can be translated favor freely done without expecting any return.

Robert McAfee Brown wrote, "That's what grace is — God hanging with us whether we deserve it or not, loving us no matter how unlovable we may be, and refusing to give up on us, no matter how discouraging it may become" (Brown, *Reclaiming the Bible: Words for the Nineties*, 1994, p. 19).

God's grace reveals the deep, deep love of God, who wants to extend His grace to all mankind. God's grace cannot be earned. It is given freely. "For by grace you have been

saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8).

Those who are recipients of God's grace are called to live out God's grace in daily life. We have to be careful not to disgrace grace. How is it possible for someone to mishandle God's grace?

First, when we take grace for granted, we mishandle grace. Barabbas was the insurrectionist who was released instead of Jesus. Mark 15:6–15 records this Holy Week event. I've always

wondered whatever happened to Barabbas after his release? How did this unexpected turn of events impact his life? Was he grateful?

Second, when we intentionally live in sin, we mishandle grace. Grace does not give us license for loose, sinful living, but calls us to live in a way that pleases God. Have you ever heard someone claim, "I can do anything I want to; God will forgive"? That attitude takes advantage of God's grace. We are still accountable, and sin always has consequences.

Third, when we live in legalism, we mishandle grace. Grace calls us to move beyond legalistic thinking.

Chuck Swindoll wrote, "Legalism is an attitude, a mentality based on pride.

"It is an obsessive conformity to an artificial standard for the purpose of exalting oneself. A legalist assumes the place of authority and

pushes it to unwarranted extremes" (Swindoll, *The Grace Awakening*, 1990, pp. 81–82).

Jesus set us free from legalism, and any overemphasis placed on rigid rule-keeping robbing us from experiencing the grace of God is mishandling grace.

Fourth, when we refuse to receive God's forgiveness, we mishandle grace.

Because of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, the penalty for our sin has been paid once and for all, and forgiveness is available. Often our problems in life are deeply rooted in the fact that we have not accepted God's forgiveness.

Commanded to forgive

Fifth, when we refuse to grant forgiveness, we mishandle grace. If God has forgiven us, and He has, then the Christ like thing to do is to forgive others when we are hurt or offended. God commands us to forgive, and we disobey when we refuse.

Sixth, when we are impatient with others, we mishandle grace. At the heart of impatience with others is often a lack of unconditional love. God loves us just as we are, but we have not yet learned to love others just as they are. When people don't measure up to our expectations, are we critical, judgmental or petty?

Grace is a marvelous, wonderful gift, and we must be careful not to misuse it. Are we in any way disgracing God's grace?

EDITOR'S NOTE — David L. Chancey is pastor of McDonough Road Baptist Church in Fayetteville, Georgia.



CHANCEY

Letters to the Editor

Thank you for bringing needed, insightful information to your readers in each edition of the paper.

I often use information that you have provided in my Sunday School class, my Bible study group and my missions group.

On a lighter side but personally important, for one who does

not like change, the recent article "You Gotta' Hear This: New Year's Reflections" by Debbie Childers has been very helpful at the beginning of this new year.

I look forward in 2024 to the continued information and education that TAB will provide.

Teresa Noell
Anniston

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“Never lose sight of your destination. You may currently be caught in traffic ... but you have further to go.”

RICHARD BLACKABY
Author, Bible teacher, leadership podcast host

The need for “grace” would seem obvious enough in light of our frequent falls, failures, frustrations and even fears.

Is this need for “grace” ever fostered anywhere? Is it clearly and convincingly set forth anywhere in any frequent gatherings of people, many of whom are groping in the dark for answers which light up their lives?

In the words of J.S. Whale, “the answer is that it is met in the worship of the Church, where the Christian religion is given to us in all its living meaning.

“Apart from this, Christianity is no more than archaeology, a museum piece for antiquarians. The Church lives, not on ideas about God, but on God’s grace itself, mediated by His Spirit through the immediate rites of corporate worship. There the Word of God, contained in the words of Scripture, is proclaimed and heard as the gospel. There in the full diet of public worship in every Church throughout Christendom, ‘the means of grace’ are heard in the preaching of the Word where the promises of the gospel are visibly sealed by the ‘Yea’ and ‘Amen’ which is the publication of the gospel of redemption in all its comparable majesty and comfort” (152–153).

Morris Murray Jr.
 Jasper

“Waiting on God requires the willingness to bear uncertainty, to carry within oneself the unanswered question, lifting the heart to God about it whenever it intrudes upon one’s thoughts.”

Author Elizabeth Elliot

To find meaning in life, you must remember your Creator.

Bill Wilks, pastor
 NorthPark Baptist Church
 Trussville

“For me, grandparenting has become my No. 1 missions field. Just seeing them come into a relationship

with the Lord is the most precious thing I can imagine — just your own little grandkids,” said singer-songwriter **Scott Wesley Brown**.

“Even though there’s a lot of fear and anxiety felt around the world, we believe faith is the answer, and it’s encouraging to see people continue to cling to God and His Word in their greatest moments of need,” said **Bobby Gruenewald**, founder and CEO of YouVersion Bible apps.

For the third consecutive year, the verse people engaged with most was Isaiah 41:10: “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

“My values are freedom, family, fitness, faith and fight, and I try to

focus on passions that reflect those values,” said actor **Chuck Norris** in an interview with The Alabama Baptist. “Not only have we raised our kids up in the ways of the Lord, our personal Christian walk with the Lord is one of the greatest reasons that our marriage is so strong and our lives are so full of happiness and joy.”

“Recently ... I saw a resumé with an interesting sentence that piqued my curiosity. Under the heading ‘Skills,’ the applicant had written, ‘I am easy to work with.’ In a culture where we are often concerned exclusively about ourselves — looking to our own advantage, well-being, pleasure or profit without regard for others, this was a refreshingly selfless sentence,” said **Gene Mason**, Leadership Ministries.

Parables teach prayer principles

In Luke 18, Jesus taught two parables that demonstrated important principles in prayer.

First, he told about an unjust judge. A widow in his circuit asked for relief. She, no doubt, felt helpless in that society. He didn’t care, believing she was a pest. But since she was persistent, he finally granted her request.

Jesus insisted the God of the universe isn’t unjust but delights in hearing the regular prayers of His people. This is one reason a simple prayer list is helpful for us, reminding us to be persistent in our supplications.

Humility

The second parable moves from persistence to humility. Two men went to the temple to pray, but note the contrast in their attitudes. The Pharisee’s prayer announced to God how good he was!

“I fast twice a week, and I tithe all I possess,” he boasted.

Both of these are worthy practices, but Jesus instructed us to do both privately so the God who sees in secret will bless us. In other words, we don’t do good in order to be praised by others.

The Pharisee proceeded to compare himself to those around him.

“I thank God I’m not like this tax collector,” he said.

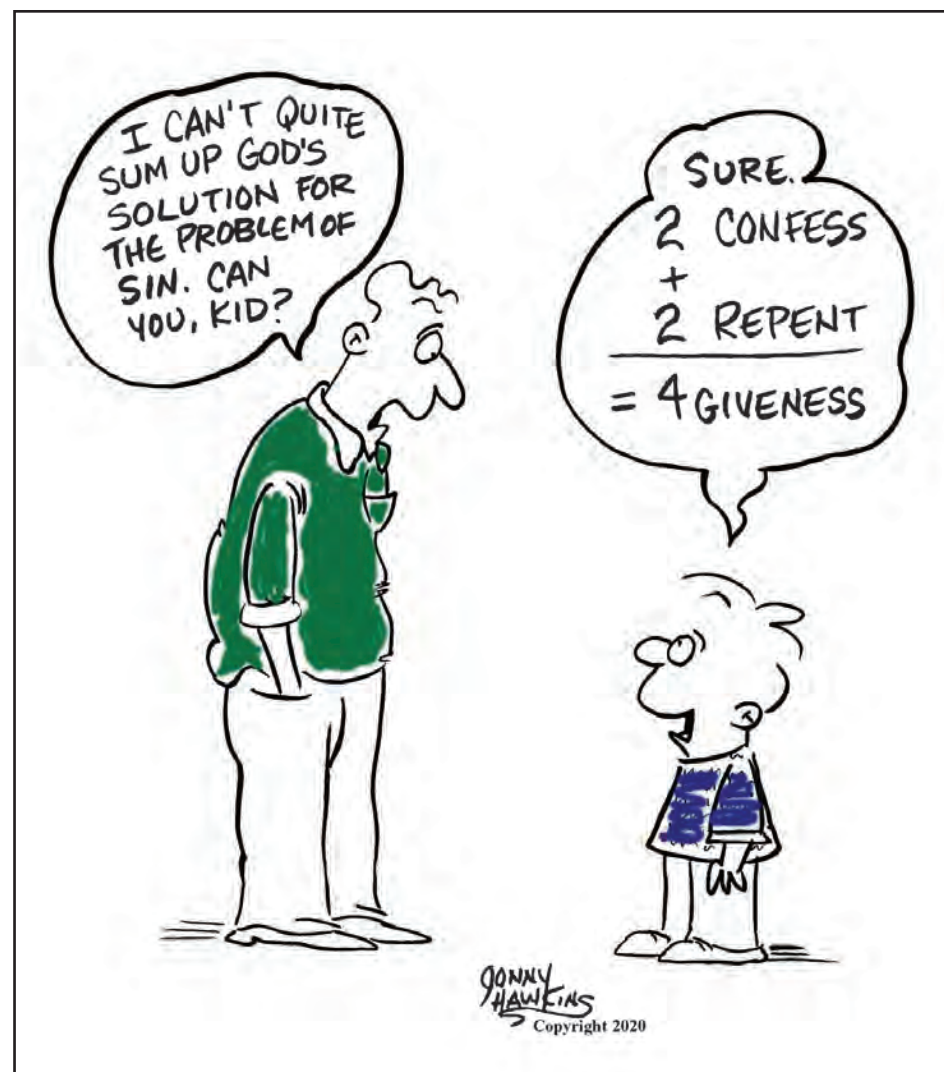
The tax collector refused any comparison when he humbled himself before the Lord.

He dared not even look toward heaven and begged God, “Be merciful to me, a sinner.”

Did God hear the prayers of both men? Of course. But Jesus declared that only one man prayed rightly.

The lowly tax collector knew the heart of God and had the assurance his prayer was answered.

Pastor Michael J. Brooks
 Siluria Baptist Church
 Alabaster



3 stories you should know



Screenshot/Good Morning America

A 7.6 magnitude earthquake hit western Japan on Jan. 1 — several aftershocks have since followed. It is reportedly the most serious and deadliest earthquake since those that hit the country in 2015 and 2016. As many as 60 are confirmed dead while rescue efforts are ongoing. Coy Webb, crisis response director of Southern Baptist's Send Relief, said the situation is being assessed and they are ready to help as soon as a request is made. (The Baptist Paper)

Settlement reached in Pressler abuse lawsuit

A confidential settlement has reportedly been reached with prejudice in a sexual abuse lawsuit against retired Texas Judge Paul Pressler, a key figure in the Southern Baptist Convention's conservative resurgence.

In addition to Pressler, the Southern Baptist Convention, First Baptist Church Houston and SBC Executive Committee were named as defendants in the case.

The suit, filed by Pressler's former assistant Gareld Duane Rollins Jr., accused Pressler of molesting him during his teenage years, with allegations of knowledge and cover-up by SBC leaders. Pressler and SBC leaders have consistently denied any wrongdoing. No specifics of the settlement, which was first reported by the Texas Tribune, were made public. (RNS)

Beloved evangelist Junior Hill dies at 87

Junior Hill, a beloved Alabama Baptist evangelist whose ministry spanned seven decades, died Jan. 3. He was 87.

A native and resident of Hartselle, Hill began his ministry at age 19.



HILL

He served as a pastor for 11 years in Alabama and Mississippi before becoming a full-time evangelist in 1967.

He led more than 1,700 revivals and numerous crusades overseas. He frequently spoke

at pastors' meetings, evangelism conferences, seminaries and state conventions.

Hill is survived by his wife of 66 years, Carole; two children, Mark and Melanie, and five grandchildren. (The Alabama Baptist)

Persecuted church

Baptists among Nigerians killed in Christmas Eve attacks

NIGERIA — A Baptist pastor and his wife were among nearly 200 Nigerians killed in a series of coordinated attacks in late December.

Militant Fulani militia targeted more than two dozen predominantly Christian communities in Central Nigeria's Plateau State, starting at about 10 p.m. on Christmas Eve and continuing into the early hours of Christmas morning.

Nine members of the Nasara Baptist Church — including Pastor Solomon Gushe and his wife — were killed in the assault on Dares in the Bokkos local government area.

"In Nigeria, the bells of Christmas turned into wails of mourning as ... Christians faced the real-



Wikimedia.org

ity of attack and persecution," said Elijah Brown, general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance.

"We mourn with these faithful families. We join with the Nigerian Baptist Convention in calling upon the Nigerian government to launch an immediate and thorough investigation that holds those responsible to judicial accountability."

The Nigerian Baptist Convention issued a public statement condemning "the wanton killings of Christians and the destruction of churches by the Fulani militia."

Israel Adelani Akanji, president of the Nigerian Baptist Convention, urged President Bola Tinubu to "provide necessary security to all Nigerians."

Akanji believes the Fulani militia "decided to strike during the Christmas celebration when people are in the mood of giving thanks to God

for the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ," according to the statement.

Musa Ashoms, commissioner of information and communication for Plateau State, reported 195 deaths due to the attacks. Amnesty International Nigeria reported more than 190 killed, while the Nigerian Red Cross confirmed 161 deaths and more than 32,000 people affected. At least 300 people were injured. (Baptist Standard)

Religious official seeks Christ after Christians beaten in Uganda

UGANDA — Two Christians speaking at a Christian-Muslim debate were chased away and beaten. Muslims organized the Nov. 13 debate but some grew angry and ambushed the speakers.

A sheikh visited the injured speakers in the hospital and told them he plans to join the Christian faith, Morning Star News reported. (MS)

Alabama news

OBITUARIES

▶ Retired pastor **Thomas Wayne McDowell** died Nov. 25. He was 89.

McDowell was a Southern Baptist pastor for many years at churches including New Bethel Baptist Church, Tusculumbia. At the time of his death, he was a member of South Side Baptist Church, Russellville, where he had previously served as an interim pastor.

He was a veteran of the U.S. Air Force and a member of the Franklin County Cattlemen's Association.

McDowell was preceded in death by his wife, Doris. He is survived by his daughter, Mary Bettye; son, Allen Wayne; and three grandchildren.



McDOWELL

BLOUNT ASSOCIATION

▶ **Pleasant View Missionary Baptist Church** will hold its regular third Sunday night singing Jan. 21 at 5 p.m. with "Dry Creek." For more information, call 256-796-5986 or 256-338-9202.

BULLOCK ASSOCIATION

▶ **John Fleming** is the new associational missions strategist of Bullock Baptist Association, Union Springs. He also serves as director of church wellness of Montgomery Baptist Association, and spent 50 years in ministry in Florida in several churches and as a director of missions. Fleming and his wife of 51 years, Kay, have two daughters and six grandchildren.



FLEMING

DEKALB ASSOCIATION

▶ **Crossville First Baptist Church** celebrated its 100th anniversary Sept. 17. Special guests included Willis Kelly, guest speaker and former pastor (1955 to 1960), and his wife, Mary Lois. Kelly served as pastor when the church built the current facility (completed

Feb. 1, 1959). Church secretary Pat Shipp was recognized for her more than 65 years of service. Commemorative plaques were presented to Chris Watkins (left), pastor, by Wendy Westerhouse (right) of the Alabama Baptist Historical Com-



Photo courtesy of Wendy Westerhouse

mission and Keith Wrenn, the association's missions strategist. Congratulatory letters were read from previous pastors Phil Winningham and Pete Chadwick, and former pastor Chris Guinn, now director of missions for Sand Mountain Association, sent a video greeting.

FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION

▶ **Fowler Springs Baptist Church, Blountsville**, celebrated its 75th anniversary Sept. 24.

The church was organized in 1947 by 30 people who saw a need for a church in their community. One of those charter members, Nettie Posey, was remembered by her son, Bryce Posey (pictured), who shared that he was the first baby born after the church started. A plaque was presented to the pastor, Michael Murphree, by Bridgett Junkin, a commissioner of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission.



Photo by Bridgett Junkin

MORGAN ASSOCIATION

▶ **Bellview Baptist Church, Decatur**, celebrated its 125th anniversary Dec. 10. Alan

Queen (right), pastor of Bellview, welcomed the congregation and led the congregation in a vow of rededication as a responsive reading. Also participating in the special day were Ken Blackwood, director of missions and ministries for Morgan Baptist Association; former pastor Scotty Hogan and Lonette Berg (left) of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. State Board of Missions disaster relief and



Photo by Ken Blackwood

chaplaincy missionary Mark Wakefield preached the message. Family members of several former pastors, now deceased, and former staff members attended, and photos of past events were shared in a slide show. On display was a quilt made by ladies in the church and a few historical documents; however, a past fire destroyed most of the church records. A celebratory luncheon followed the service.

RUSSELL ASSOCIATION

▶ **Silver Run Baptist Church, Seale**, celebrated its 50th anniversary with a weekend of activities, Sept. 22-24, beginning with a Friday night movie, "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe," followed by a singing jubilee, Saturday, featuring Nick Akin of Atlanta; The Seekers Quartet of Phenix City; and Randy and Sherri Miller of Nashville. The celebration culminated Sunday with a special worship service.



Photo courtesy of Debra Sellers

The guest speaker was Cheyne McLean, a former member now serving as a staff pastor of counseling and pastoral care at Berean Covenant Church, Midland, Georgia. Special music was provided by the Millers, and a plaque was presented to Debra Sellers (center), church historian, and Jimmy Hodge (left), a deacon, by Calvin Milford (right), a commissioner of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. Richie Ashburn is pastor.

SOUTHEAST ALABAMA ASSOCIATION

▶ **Smyrna Baptist Church, Dothan**, hosted its 158th homecoming Nov. 5, with dinner on the grounds following worship. Special music was led by Mack Thomley, and the message was preached by Billy Womack. Former members, friends and family participated in the service.

FBC Florence celebrates becoming debt free, holds note-burning ceremony

First Baptist Church Florence celebrates becoming debt free "all to God's glory" with a note-burning ceremony Nov. 19. Church trustees, deacons and current and former staff participated. Pictured are (l to r) pastor Kevin Johnson, former pastor Larry Wright, Marc Dempsey, Ryan Clayton, Tres Coker, Whitney Barnett and Ben Graves. (The Alabama Baptist)



Submitted photo

Reginald Calvert



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Matt Queen



Herb Reavis



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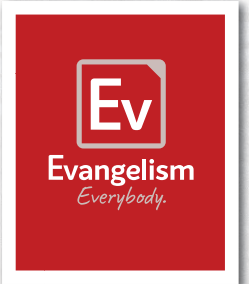
**Sunday-5:30 pm, Monday-8:30 am
First Baptist Church, Pelham**

An annual statewide event for encouraging and equipping believers to **make a difference** through evangelism. *No admission fee. No registration required. Alabama WMU will have a gift for all ministers' wives.*

evangelizeAL.org/sec

MATT QUEEN will be teaching a session on "Getting to the Gospel" (in our conversations).

FREE MONDAY LUNCHEON with a keynote message by Herb Reavis.



Alabama Baptist
STATE BOARD OF MISSIONS

This conference is made possible by gifts of Alabama Baptists through the Cooperative Program.

ANSWERED PRAYERS

Pregnancy counselor sees God's plan woven miraculously throughout her story

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Kathryn Barnhill knows she was an answer to prayer. But not her mother's.

Her great-aunt's.

And the story is something only God could orchestrate, Barnhill said.

"My birth mother was a college student who found herself in an unplanned pregnancy," she said. "She had sought out an abortion, but since it wasn't legal then, she left and decided to have the baby in secret and make an adoption plan."

Barnhill's mother moved in with her aunt, but she still managed to hide her pregnancy. She didn't tell her aunt that she was expecting until she called to tell her she was at the hospital with a newborn.

Stunned, Barnhill's great-aunt went to the hospital, met her great-niece — who would soon be part of a different family — and prayed for a miracle.

"She prayed three things over me that day — that I would be raised in a Christian home, that I would come to know Christ at a young age and that I would serve the Lord," Barnhill said.

It would be 28 years before her great-aunt would learn that God had used her as the answer to her own prayer — and that He'd done it five years before Barnhill was born.

Just hang on and you'll see how, Barnhill said.

Adoptive family's prayers

"My (adoptive) parents had been praying for another child," she said, noting that she spent five weeks in foster care before she was placed with her new parents.

"They ... always pointed me to the fact that God had a plan and that this



Photo courtesy of Kathryn Barnhill

Kathryn Barnhill (center) stands with her adoptive parents Harry and Shirley Perkerson.

was how God had put our family together."

As she grew up, their faith became her own, and she also developed a passion for adoption and helping women understand why it's a better choice than abortion. Then when she was in college, a friend suggested she work for an adoption agency.

"I found one in the Yellow Pages and started volunteering, and within months they offered me a job," Barnhill said.

"I ... tried to learn everything; I soaked it all up."

An opportunity eventually opened up for her to become a pregnancy counselor, then later she moved from Greenville, South Carolina, to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, to start a counseling and pregnancy center there.

And as she counseled mothers-to-be, she continued to think about her own birth mom.

"I saw these moms who were lov-

ingly making these decisions for their babies and I thought I needed to ... let [my birth mom] know how much I love her and appreciate her decision."

It took Barnhill four years but she found her and discovered she had never had any other children.

Healing the hurt

Her mom told her she had wanted an abortion at first because she never wanted to be a mom.

"I prayed and asked God to let me use the opportunity, and I told her I was sorry she had had to go through that," Barnhill said.

And as they continued to stay in touch, Barnhill continued to see God put the pieces together.

"He used us coming together to heal some of the hurt and brokenness in her life and helped her restore her relationship with her mom," she said. "My birth mother was one of two, and neither had children. When she was able to tell her mom that I existed, I was pregnant with my daughter, so she now had a grand-

daughter and was about to have a great-granddaughter."

Barnhill was able to meet her birth grandmother and let her share in the joy of her pregnancy.

"She gave me a cradle that had been in the family for a long time," Barnhill said. "My daughter was the seventh generation to use it, which was special since it wasn't used in the sixth generation."

Her grandmother has since passed away, "but we became friends and enjoyed a relationship, and it was special to get to share in the joy of her being a grandmother," Barnhill said.

And Barnhill was also reunited with her great-aunt, and as they swapped information, they were both in awe at the story God had written.

"She told me she had prayed those three things for me, but she didn't know that she had been the one God used to bring my adoptive parents to faith," Barnhill said. "God had used her and her husband to start the Bible study my parents would come to know the Lord at five years before I was born."

Barnhill said it's amazing to see God at work in the details of her own story and the stories of the other women she gets to talk to at the center she started, which now functions as the Myrtle Beach office of Lifeline Children's Services, a Birmingham-based evangelical adoption and child welfare agency.

"God always shows up in a way to show He's in it," she said. "Whether [the women coming to the center] place or they parent, to see what God does

when He brings them to Lifeline and brings them to hear the gospel and be loved on unconditionally, it's amazing. We see Him meet their needs and help them with resources, and we watch them go from darkness to light in so many ways."

**Sanctity of
Human Life
Sunday is
Jan. 21.**

**For more
information
about Lifeline
Children's
Services, visit
lifeline.org.**

Family launches coffee company to help trafficking victims

By **Timothy M. Powell**
Missouri's The Pathway

This summer, after seeing “Sound of Freedom” in theaters, Missouri Baptist pastor David Slusher went home angry.

Slusher, pastor of Gill Memorial Baptist Church in Marshall, recalls being deeply affected by the film, which exposes the dark reality of human sex trafficking — a plight which goes largely unnoticed and unaddressed by many Americans.

“Having a 5-year-old daughter and seeing that movie, it just broke my heart,” Slusher said. “All I could see was my daughter. The evil of this — it’s just unreal.”

Slusher was unsettled

and angry. But he knew that emotional anger alone doesn’t fix anything.

“When I was leaving that theater, I was so angry,” Slusher reflected. “I don’t want to have this emotional anger; I want to have a righteous anger. I don’t want to just be mad about something. I want to do something about this!”

Eager to make a difference, Slusher worked with his son-in-law, Alec Whitener, to launch a Christ-centered coffee brand, focused on raising awareness and funds for the fight against human trafficking. Their company, Christ Coffee, officially launched, Nov. 20.

Whitener, a member at Calvary Baptist in Hannibal, said he has always

wanted to start a business that is “outwardly Christian.” The 22 year old is a student at Hannibal-LaGrange University, currently pursuing a master’s degree in leadership with an emphasis in business management.

Sharing true hope

“We knew, when we wanted to start this business, we wanted to partner with some organization that was going to share the hope of Jesus in some manner,” Whitener said.

They’ve chosen to partner with Destiny Rescue, a Christian nonprofit that exists to rescue and reintegrate exploited children.

Gospel focus

One thing that separates Destiny Rescue from other agencies, Slusher explained, is that “with every child that they rescue, they share the



Photo courtesy of David Slusher
Missouri Baptist pastor David Slusher (right) and his son-in-law, Alec Whitener (left), have begun Christ Coffee to help trafficking victims.

“programs that defend kids.” Since its founding in 2001, Destiny Rescue agents have rescued more than 13,000 children out of exploitation and abuse. Slusher expressed his hope that Christ Coffee will serve as a constant reminder of the plight of trafficking victims, while also providing a tangible way for Christians to respond.

Christ Coffee works with a California-based supplier, selling coffee products online and fulfilling orders via drop-shipping.

According to Slusher, when customers make a coffee purchase online, their order will be roasted, packaged and shipped the same day.

EDITOR’S NOTE — This article first appeared in Missouri’s The Pathway and is reprinted with permission.

For more information about Christ Coffee, visit christ.coffee. For more information about Destiny Rescue, visit destinyrescue.org.



Pastors and Church Leaders

CITIZENS IN ACTION TRAINING



Steve Marshall
Alabama Attorney General



Dr. Gary Hollingsworth
Former Executive Director-Treasurer of the South Carolina Baptist Convention



Harrison Smith
Regional Alliance Director at Alliance Defending Freedom



Rev. Greg Davis
ALCAP President and CEO



State Rep. Scott Stadthagen
Alabama House Majority Leader

Select members of the Alabama State Legislature will be present. Seating is limited – Register at ALCAP.com



January 25th
11:30am-4:00pm



Shades Mountain Baptist Church
2017 Columbiana Road, Birmingham, AL 35216

January 11 is National Human Trafficking Awareness Day.

Spreading awareness

Baptist Women of North America takes on human trafficking, strengthens connections across continent

EDITOR'S NOTE — Baptist World Alliance is a global community of 51 million Baptists from 176,000 churches. Under that umbrella, BWA Women provides support for missions and ministries in seven continental unions representing more than 150 countries. This is the last in a series of eight stories about leaders in each region, the challenges they face and the way they see God working through women across the globe.

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

The Baptist Women of North America, which is part of Baptist World Alliance Women, face similar family, work and environmental struggles as all women worldwide, said TaNikka Sheppard, former president of BWNA.

The current BWNA president, Patty Lane, agrees, saying no matter what life is like for these women living in the U.S. and Canada, they have one common battle: “The time to do all they want and feel called to do.”

Past experiences

Lane just started a five-year term at BWNA after retiring from the Baptist General Convention of Texas, where she worked for 37 years.

She also has been a Journeyman through the International Mission Board, a multicultural church planter and the director of intercultural ministries with BGCT.

“I became involved in [Baptist World Alliance] through [North American Baptist Fellowship] in 2004–2005 when the Vietnamese churches in the U.S. wanted to approach the Vietnamese government



Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist
TaNikka Sheppard, former president of Baptist Women of North America, points out the struggles that are common to all women throughout North America in the United States and Canada.

about giving recognition to other Baptist groups in Vietnam. By working with NABF, we were able to bring this issue to BWA, and a group of us went to Vietnam in the summer of 2006 to conduct those talks,” Lane said.

“It was a real opportunity to see the power of Baptists working together from across the world. From that point forward I have been so blessed to be part of BWA.”

Along with her work with BWNA, Lane leads a group from her church to help Afghan families who have moved to the Dallas area and is involved in helping solve the homelessness problem for refugees and immigrants.

Lane might be new to the role, but she has already been touched by the women of BWNA and one

particular area of their ministry focus — human trafficking.

“My experience is pretty limited, but I remember the big event in Toronto. It was a beautiful time together. I loved meeting so many

women and hearing how they, in big and small ways, were changing the world.”

“The topic was human trafficking in all of its forms,” she continued. “[It was] a difficult topic, but such care and respect was taken. I was moved. One testimony shared was a woman

who had been involved in prostitution in the past. She had gone outside the hotel where we were all staying one night and found a girl who at that very hotel that very night had been trafficked. [It was] very eye opening to what is all

around, but I had no eyes to see.”

BWNA has developed resources to spread awareness about human trafficking. Go to bwna.today/resources/human-trafficking for group studies, individual studies, potential speakers and information for students.

Sheppard knows how crucial connection is, especially for those who can’t access services due to the distance. During her term, she focused on increasing the use of virtual platforms.

Lane regrets not understanding the incredible need for communication among women when she was young.

“I would have tried to get involved as a young woman and encouraged my friends who felt disenfranchised from their local Baptist body to get involved. Who knows? That connection may have been enough to have kept them serving in Baptist ministry,” Lane said.

‘Baptist family’

“It is the friends and colleagues through BWA that feel like my Baptist family,” she said. “They introduced me to BWA and I have been so blessed through those new relationships.”

As BWNA president, Lane has also already learned “women can be supportive of each other, learn from each other and feel empowered through each other to do all that God has called us each to do. Women do not have to serve alone.”

Prayer needs for BWNA include:

- ▶ To have discernment.
- ▶ To hear God’s leading and have the courage to obey.
- ▶ To be effective leaders.
- ▶ To be encouragers.

To find out more about BWNA, go to bwawomen.org and find this region in “Continental Unions” under the tab “About Us.”

Someone You Should Know

HOYT WASHINGTON

By Leigh Pritchett
The Alabama Baptist

Evangelism — that’s my heart, my desire,” said Hoyt Washington, 87, of Trussville. It is a crucial part of his three-pronged focus of prayer, chaplaincy and discipleship. In the various places where he has lived, Washington has taught Sunday School and served as deacon and Brotherhood Commission director. Educated at Snead State Community College, Auburn University and the University of Alabama, Washington holds a doctorate in education administration. For 24 years, he taught in the Jefferson County school system. He was the first superintendent of education for Pell City Schools when it formed and later was school superintendent for Baldwin County in Georgia. He and Charlotte, his wife of 57 years, have two children and six grandchildren.

Q: Who was or is one of the most influential people in your faith life?

A: 1. My father: I saw him reading his Bible daily after a long day of work. He set an example for me early in life.

2. Ray Cole, staff member at Gardendale First Baptist Church: While teaching a discipleship class at that church and teaching us to write a 3-minute testimony, he said, “Guys, you cannot share something you don’t have.” I then asked the Lord for a testimony that would be pleasing to Him. My life exploded spiritually. If you ask the Lord for a testimony, tighten your seat belt. God answers prayer.

3. Truitt Guffin, deacon and teacher at Gardendale FBC: He took me under his wing ... and got me involved in church leadership.

4. Lewis Marler, former pastor of Gardendale FBC: He set an example and inspired me to grow.

5. A.L. Courtney, former pastor of First Baptist Church Pell City: A.L. (now deceased) was my pastor, friend, prayer partner and mentor while we lived in Pell City. He was faithful and always about his Father’s business.

MINISTRY:
Prayer, chaplaincy and discipleship

CHURCH NAME:
NorthPark Baptist Church, Trussville, in Birmingham Metro Baptist Association

LIFE VERSE: “Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted in the earth” (Ps. 46:10).



6. Bill Wilks, pastor of NorthPark Baptist Church: He is my friend, pastor, mentor and always an encouragement. He has challenged me to be spiritually clean, be intentionally active for the Lord and make disciples.

7. Bob Hall: He is my mentor, friend, life group leader. He encourages me to memorize Scripture and serve the Lord with him.

Q: Tell about a turning point in your life and how God was involved.

A: My turning point was when I asked God for a testimony that was pleasing to Him. ... The Lord led me to commit to meet Him each day early in the morning.

Q: What has God been teaching you lately?

A: The importance of the time God has given me. The need to use the foundation and maturity His Word has given me. The Bible says that people need to know the Lord. I am being held accountable for the blessings given me.

Q: If there was one thing you could tell your younger self about faith, what would it be?

A: Memorize Scripture ... as you go through life.

Lass WORDS

BY KEN LASS
The Alabama Baptist



DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

The story behind the smile

I sit behind the desk at my volunteer station. I do this every week. Many people pass by, but one in particular commands my attention.

It’s a young lady. I’m terrible at guessing how old folks are, but I estimate her to be maybe 30-something. She will walk past two or three times a day. She’s wearing a uniform, so I assume she is an employee. I don’t know her name.

The reason I can’t help but notice her is because of this incredible, bright smile on her face virtually all the time.

Sharing a smile

It’s one of those smiles that just lights up the room. It draws people to her like a magnet. She’s always surrounded by people, engaging with them and sometimes seems to be instructing or training them.

Each time she comes by my area, she flashes that friendly countenance and asks me how I’m doing, how my day is going. She’s the kind of person you instantly like and feel comfortable around. Clearly, everybody else feels the same way.

One day I was chatting with a fellow volunteer as this cheerful lady walked by. Once again we got the warm smile and a friendly greeting from her.

That’s when my co-worker happened to remark about how amazingly well she was holding up. Holding up? From what? “Her husband passed away last

weekend,” I was told. It was sudden and unexpected. Some sort of aneurysm or stroke. He was just a young man as well. The funeral had taken place just four days prior.

Inner strength

I was stunned. You would never have known by the way she looked or acted. My heart broke for her, even though I didn’t really know her other than to exchange a little small talk now and then. Weeks have passed. She remains the same delightful person each time I see her.

I don’t know if she’s a Christian, but I can’t imagine having that kind of inner strength without the support of God’s love.

It really brought home to me that looks are often deceiving. There are people around us walking through life feigning happiness and putting on a good front, but inside they may be hurting and dealing with any manner of tragedy and loss, fear and worry.

They could use a good friend, a shoulder to lean on and perhaps a prayer warrior.

And especially a friendly smile. One like hers.

MEET THE AUTHOR

Ken Lass is a retired Birmingham television news and sports anchor, and an award-winning columnist for numerous publications and websites.

AGING WELL

Seven tips for maintaining brain fitness

By Vicki Heath
The Alabama Baptist

People are reestablishing fitness routines all around us, and while physical fitness is important, we also need to be intentional about brain fitness.

Here are seven proven suggestions for maintaining a healthy brain:

1. Connect with others daily

Studies show that people who have an active social life can reduce the risk of dementia.

I need a lot of people in my life. I have friends with whom I pray and another group I exercise with. We were not designed to do life by ourselves.

I have friends who help me see things in a different light and from a different perspective, which stimulates my thinking.

2. Keep learning

Every time you learn something new you develop new brain cells. My in-laws are retired Southern

Baptist ministers, over 80 and are amazing learners.

I am delighted when my husband will be talking to his dad and telling him about a new book he has just read and his dad will say, "Oh yes, I finished that one myself last month."

We are never too old to learn something new.

3. Seek peace

Sometimes we give into worrying instead of praying. Every person I know is living in some kind of stress. Jesus said it would be this way.

The problem comes when I get into stress overload, and I become "distressed."

Stress overload can manifest itself into worry.

Too much stress may lead to excess cortisol in the brain, which can affect our memory. Seeking time with God, listening for His voice, letting Him lead us beside still waters rejuvenates my mind and my spirit and reminds me of His sure and precious promises.



Freepik photo

4. Turn off the TV

Since we moved to Edisto Island, off the coast of South Carolina, we have some kind of TV cable on steroids and now have about a hundred more channels not to watch.

New studies show that people who watch more than seven hours of TV a day are at a higher risk of developing memory loss.

I would hate to add up all

the hours in a lifetime that we have wasted watching programs on TV that have little or no eternal value.

5. Eliminate hurry from your life

Nothing makes me crazier than having too much to do in my 24-hour day.

It causes my thinking to become frantic and unclear. I tend to make hasty and impulsive decisions when I am in a hurry. I make more mistakes and tend to forget things a lot more.

I have a lot to think about these days, and I certainly don't need to have my decision-making process compromised.

Having my prayer time every morning and praying over my "planner" helps me keep things in perspective.

I ask God to prioritize my day that it should go according to His plan for me.

6. Keep moving

I can't begin to tell you the studies that conclusively show how exercise keeps the brain healthy. It helps with blood flow; it lightens our mood.

I have discovered that when my mind is bogged down with too much information, if I go even for a short walk, my mind clears.

7. Let God renew your mind with His word

He has changed my mind about so many things over the years.

I used to think I could not write. I used to think I could not speak in public. I used to think I could not understand the Bible. I used to think He did not love me.

I have changed my mind about all of these because He has transformed my mind with a new way of thinking. His Holy Spirit is a good and kind personal trainer who is teaching me brain fitness.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Vicki Heath is national director of First Place for Health. Vicki is a certified fitness instructor, a certified life coach and wellness coordinator for her church in Edisto Beach, South Carolina. Her books include "Don't Quit Get Fit" and "My First Place."



HEATH

The journey to mend his heart led here.

Qua was born with tricuspid atresia that required a series of open heart surgeries as an infant. But as a teen, his health took a dramatic turn. Qua's pediatrician and cardiologist recognized something wasn't right with his heart and sent him to Children's of Alabama. Our team was standing by when he arrived by helicopter, and within two weeks he received a new heart. He rebounded quickly and was back at home a few weeks later, thanks to the expert heart team here at Children's of Alabama.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Youth ministry leaders invited to Conclave '24

Are you involved in leading youth ministry in a staff or volunteer capacity?

We would love to see you at Youth Ministry Conclave, an annual leadership event in cooperation with eight state conventions.

Each year, Conclave serves as a training event for youth pastors, leaders and volunteers. Corporate worship, breakout sessions and networking are designed to equip and rejuvenate your youth ministry team.

The event will be held Jan. 18–20 at Chattanooga

Convention Center in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

The speakers are:
▶ Ben Trueblood, director of student ministry for Lifeway with 20 years of

student ministry experience.

▶ Erik Reed, founding and lead pastor of The Journey Church in Lebanon, Tennessee.

▶ Grant Skeldon, author and next gen director for Q Ideas.

▶ Tate Cockrell, associate professor of counseling at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Join us at Conclave 2024 as you discover limitless call, limitless mercy and limitless possibilities as you lean into the power of our limitless God.

To register, visit ymconclave.org.

To register, visit ymconclave.org or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.



Bible skills for kids, youth

Everyone can benefit from learning more Bible skills, especially at a young age.

The “Can You Hear Me?” Bible Skills and Drills event will offer a chance for kids and youth to learn better Bible-handling skills, whether they’re participating in Bible drill or not.

The event — set for Jan.

27, 9 a.m.–2 p.m., at Shades Crest Baptist Church in Birmingham — will provide them with the opportunity to learn about God’s Word and how to use it in their lives.

The theme “Can You Hear Me?” comes from Proverbs 8:33. Children in grades 3–6 and youth through high school are invited to attend along with their leaders.

Two tracks will be provided at the event:

▶ One for those interested in preparing to participate in Bible Drill.

▶ One for those interested in learning God’s Word and developing great Bible skills.

The cost is \$20 per person, which includes lunch.

To register, visit kidzlinkal.org/events.

Unwind gives youth leaders a chance to connect each week

If you’re a youth leader, there’s a Zoom call you should be a part of on Thursday mornings at 9.

This weekly chat, called Unwind, is a “great opportunity to connect with student leaders from all over

the state,” said Josh Meadows, student ministry strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

Jump on the call Thursday mornings and be a part of talking about what God is doing in youth ministries

all around the state. We want to hear from you — be ready to answer a couple of questions about the ministry God has entrusted you to lead.

To register, visit ymlink.org/unwind.

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

Place a classified ad below for \$1 per word. For more information call 205-870-4720, ext. 200, or email ads@thealabamabaptist.org. To place an online classified ad for \$9.99/month, visit thealabamabaptist.org/classifieds.

CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR

Seventh St. Baptist Church Cullman, Alabama, seeking full-time pastor at our traditional church. Services Sunday and Wednesday. Cullman is a growing town with excellent schools, parks, shopping. Resumés to: pastorsearch7thst@gmail.com. For more information on the church: seventhstbaptist.com.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Silver Run Baptist Church in Seale, Alabama, located in rural Russell County, is seeking a bivocational pastor that the Lord would have to serve here. Resumés may be sent to: P.O. Box 8, Seale, AL 36875, ATTN: Kenny Harris.

WORSHIP LEADER/ MINISTER OF EDUCATION

First Baptist Red Bay, Alabama, seeking full-time worship leader/minister of education. Apply by resumé to: 602 4th St. SE, Red Bay, AL 35582.

DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN’S MINISTRIES

First Baptist Church of Birmingham is seeking a director of children’s ministries. This person should be a devoted believer, gifted in organization and leadership and most of all committed to loving children and their families. Resumés can be emailed to: cjames@fbcbbm.org or Children’s Search Committee, 2209 Lakeshore Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209.

CHILDREN & FAMILY MINISTER/DIRECTOR

First Baptist, Dadeville, located in the heart of Dadeville, Alabama, is seeking God’s person to fill the position of children and family minister/director. Full-time job with a competitive salary. Interested individuals should contact John Wilcox at employment@fbcdadeville.com. Resumés may be sent to the same address.

SIGNS

CHURCH SIGN

Signs are your first impression. What kind of impression is your church sign making? Call us to replace/update yours with either digital or traditional. Statewide since 1994. 1-800-729-6844 or 205-664-0955. www.reliablesigns.com

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MINISTRIES

THE WELLNESS KITCHEN

The Wellness Kitchen is a blog and e-newsletter focused on healthy living, ingredients and recipes. The Wellness Kitchen was started by Pat Terry, a registered dietitian and nutrition professor at Samford University for 30 years. Visit her website at thewellnesskitchenrd.com to read more and subscribe to her monthly e-newsletter.

STRUGGLING TOWARD HOPE: A RESOURCE FOR GRIEF

Following the death of his wife in 1998, Bob Terry wrote, “Struggling Toward Hope: Life After the Death of a Spouse.” This book shares not only the personal lessons he learned along that journey, but also practical tips for survivors as they learn to live after a loved one dies. “Struggling Toward Hope: Life After the Death of a Spouse,” is published by Soncoast Publishing in Hartselle, Alabama, and is available in e-book and print from most major booksellers. Visit his website at drbobterry.com.

PENNPPOINT COUNSELING

Dr. Romeo Penn is a licensed clinical pastoral counselor/therapist. Dr. Penn serves those in need of pre-marriage, marriage and relationship counseling, as well as those struggling with grief depression, anxiety, fear and anger. Visit his website at pennpointcounseling.com to learn more. Dr. Penn also recently published his first workbook, “R.P.T. Therapy: Rejoice. Prayer. Thanksgiving.” It is available for purchase through Amazon.

CHRISTIAN Crossword



ACROSS

- 1. The Son of Man is come to save that which was _____. (Matt. 18:11)
- 5. Let down your _____ for a draught. (Luke 5:4)
- 9. Low-ranking soldier. (abbr.)
- 12. Take thine _____, eat, drink and be merry. (Luke 12:19)
- 13. Lengthy, lyrical poems.
- 14. River. (Spanish)
- 15. Metric unit.
- 16. Speaks of.
- 18. Blueprints.
- 20. Takes to court.
- 21. Grinned.
- 24. Frosted.
- 26. Ties one's shoes.
- 27. Monotony.
- 30. A city in Oklahoma.
- 31. Setting.
- 33. That from which metal is extracted.
- 34. I would that all _____ even as I myself. (1 Cor. 7:7; 2 words)
- 36. Stolen waters are _____. (Prov. 9:17)
- 38. Not my will, but thine, be _____. (Luke 22:42)
- 39. Thunderous rains.
- 40. _____ Stravinsky.
- 42. Small unclean animal. (Lev. 11:29)
- 44. Highway directories.
- 46. David dwelt in the _____. (2 Sam. 5:9)
- 50. For _____ have sinned. (Rom. 3:23)
- 51. The home of Salt Lake City.
- 52. He came _____ his own. (John 1:11)

1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8		9	10	11
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50				51					52			
53				54					55			

By Lee Esch Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

- 53. Major football organization. (abbr.) (Mark 8:24; 2 words)
- 54. Sandwich shop. 19. Diminish.
- 55. Sly, suggestive look. 21. Close hard.

DOWN

- 1. Make bare the _____. (Isa. 47:2)
- 2. Boat paddle.
- 3. Social Security Administration. (abbr.)
- 4. For the _____ of God is holy. (1 Cor. 3:17)
- 5. Desert wanderer.
- 6. God planted a garden eastward in _____. (Gen. 2:8)
- 7. Stress.
- 8. Supersonic transport. (abbr.)
- 9. The Lord ... plentifully rewardeth the _____. (Ps. 31:23; 2 words)
- 10. I am the _____, ye are the branches. (John 15:5)
- 11. The waves thereof _____ themselves. (Jer. 5:22)
- 17. _____ men as trees, walking.
- 22. The Word was _____ flesh. (John 1:14)
- 23. _____ things through Christ. (Phil. 4:13; 4 words)
- 25. Peaks.
- 27. For the _____ that is in the land of Assyria. (Isa. 7:18)
- 28. A city in Utah.
- 29. New York team.
- 32. Incinerate.
- 35. In the beginning was the _____. (John 1:1)
- 37. Neither have I desired the _____ day. (Jer. 17:16)
- 39. Japanese fish dish.
- 40. Tehran is its capital.
- 41. Country club sport.
- 43. Gem.
- 45. Wet dirt.
- 47. For there is _____ God. (Mark 12:32)
- 48. A fixed path of travel. (abbr.)
- 49. Rocky hilltop.

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

Bivocational ministers' retreat set for Feb. 9-10

Maybe you're a bivocational minister who faces the Monday morning blues. Maybe you struggle to find a rhythm of rest.

Or maybe you could use some tools for preparing a sermon in the midst of your busy schedule.

At the Bivocational Minister/Spouse Retreat, you can hear talks on these topics and more. The retreat, set for Feb. 9-10 at Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center in Talladega, will offer a time of spiritual inspiration, fellowship, encouragement and instruction.

"I want each pastor to take home practical ideas he can use to carry out his

local ministry assignment," said Ken Allen, director of the office of LeaderCare at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

Allen will lead sessions along with Rob Jackson, director of the SBOM office of church health, and Sammy Gilbreath, retired director of the SBOM office of evangelism.

Page Hughes, a well-known speaker and teacher, will also speak to pastors' wives.

The retreat starts Feb. 9 at 4 p.m. and ends Feb. 10 at 12 p.m.

The cost is \$40 per couple or \$30 for single occupancy.

To register, visit leadercareal.org/bivoretreat.

DNA Annual Gathering

If you're a church staff member who leads your church's Sunday School, discipleship or education ministries, please join us at the Discipleship Network of Alabama's Annual Gathering.

The "Canoeing the Mountains" event will be Jan. 18-19 at Shades Mountain Baptist Church in Birmingham from 1 p.m. on Thursday to 12:30 p.m. Friday.

Ken Braddy, director of Sunday School and network partnerships for Lifeway, will lead on the topic of Small Groups and Sunday School: Building Your Ministry.

"I believe in God's ability to transform people through His Word," Braddy said. "I believe that discipleship happens best in community. Sunday School and small groups are the perfect places for believers to grow together."

The gathering's schedule includes presentations, question-and-answer sessions and opportunities for networking.

The cost is \$89 through Jan. 13 and \$99 the week of the event. The recommended hotel is Embassy Suites in Hoover on Highway 150. To register, visit disciplealabama.org/2024.



BRADDY

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For January 14

Explore the Bible

By Douglas K. Wilson, Ph.D.

Executive Director of the Center for Christian Calling, University of Mobile



LAND Genesis 8:10–22

God's timing is perfect. For 40 days and nights, it rained on the earth. For another 150 days the waters prevailed on the land until the ark rested on the mountains of Ararat. After another 40 days, Noah opened the windows and sent out a raven to search the earth for dry ground. Noah and his family were ready to walk on solid earth again.

Wait (10–14)

In God's timing, the raven does not return. It must have somewhere to land or something to scavenge. Noah then sends out a dove. The dove brings nothing back to indicate solid ground, so the family waits another week before sending the dove again.

Upon returning this time, the dove brings back an olive branch. After another week, Noah sends the dove again, but she does not return.

The olive branch has become a familiar symbol of peace. We even utilize an idiom based on the symbol: "They are extending an olive branch."

In this narrative, the peace the branch represents is a renewed fellowship initiated by God that is dependent on submission to God. One must remember that the thoughts and intents of humanity's hearts were evil all the time (6:5).

Even after the flood, this is true of Noah's family, yet God extends His grace to them.

The world in which we live is still stained with sin, and even now we wait for the redemption of the whole earth (Rom. 8:18–23).

We walk by faith, in part, by trusting God to work out His redemptive purposes in His own time.

As followers of Christ, we recognize that every good and perfect gift comes from God (James 1:17) and that everything

we receive is by God's grace, for our good and for His glory.

This is true as we wait upon the Lord individually, as a family and as a church family.

Exit (15–19)

In God's timing, Noah receives instructions to disembark. After more than a year on this floating zoo, the animals are leaving the ark.

His sons and their wives are leaving the Ararat cruise ship. Mr. and Mrs. Noah — no, her name is not Joan of Ark — are receiving mercy from God. They are also going to be entrusted with new responsibilities.

"Be fruitful and multiply" (v. 17). If this statement about the departing animals sounds familiar, it should. Back in Genesis 1, both animals (v. 22) and humanity (v. 28) were instructed to be fruitful and multiply. Later in this narrative, Noah and his family will again be instructed to do so (9:1, 7).

Worship (20–22)

In God's timing, Noah builds an altar for worship, taking one of each of the types of clean animals, and then offering them as burnt offerings to God. How did Noah know which animals God considered to be clean?

After all, Moses does not identify them to Israel in the dietary code until Leviticus 11.

God brought a different number of each of the clean animals — either seven or seven pairs — prior to the flood.

Noah's act of worship looks back and looks ahead. It points back to Genesis 3, where God initiated blood sacrifice as a sign of God's redemptive plan for substitutionary atonement from sin.

It also points ahead to the once-for-all blood sacrifice for sin through Jesus Christ (Heb. 7:27; 9:11–12, 26; 10:10).

Bible Studies for Life

By Rony Kozman, Ph.D.

Assistant professor of Biblical Studies, Samford University



LIFE-CHANGING FAITH Luke 5:1–11

Faith begins when we hear God's Word. (1–3)

Throughout Luke 4 and 5, we see two related themes. We see Jesus doing miracles, and we see different responses to Jesus' miracles. Before Jesus' signs we read He was "full of the Holy Spirit" (4:1), tested by the devil in the wilderness (4:1–2) and then "returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit" (4:14).

When He then arrives in Nazareth and goes to the synagogue, Jesus reads from Isaiah 61:1 and announces "the Spirit of the Lord God is on Me," and so He has been anointed to proclaim good news, liberate the captives and oppressed and heal the blind (Luke 4:18–19).

After this announcement, Jesus performs a number of signs.

He casts out demons, He heals Simon's mother-in-law of her fever, He heals those sick "with various diseases" (4:40), He instructs Simon so that Simon catches an abundance of fish, He heals a man with a skin disease and He heals a paralyzed man.

All of these miracles are to show that Jesus is the Son of David, the awaited ruler of God's Kingdom whose reign brings peace since He is the one who defeats the evil powers that have usurped God's reign and subjugated the world.

Jesus is liberating creation from the rule and tyranny of these demonic powers.

Faith is simply acting on what Christ calls us to do. (4–7)

The various miracles Jesus performs are also met with various responses.

We read of the response of the demons in 4:34 and 4:41 who rec-

ognize Jesus' Messianic identity and so obey Jesus' authority.

Once Simon's mother-in-law is healed of her fever "she got up immediately and began to serve them" (4:39).

When Jesus enables Peter, James and John to catch the multitude of fish, Peter prostrates himself before Jesus, recognizing his own sinfulness, and all three of them leave everything to follow Jesus.

The man healed of his skin disease acknowledges Jesus' ability to heal him. And when Jesus forgives (and then heals) the paralyzed man, the Scribes and the Pharisees question Jesus' authority to forgive sins while the healed man goes home "glorifying God" (5:25).

Jesus calls us to a life of trust in Him. (8–11)

How do we respond to Jesus' authority as the Son of David, the Messiah who has regained God's Kingdom? How do you compare to these different characters?

Are we like the demons who recognize Jesus' authority but obey unwillingly? Or are we like the Scribes and Pharisees who deny Jesus' authority? Are we like Peter's mother-in-law who served Jesus or like the paralyzed man who was healed and glorified God?

These latter two are commendable, and so is the response of Peter who recognized he was sinful and submitted himself to the One who has authority to free him of his sins. But Peter, James and John exemplify the response Luke wants us to emulate, leaving everything and following Jesus.

This is the response that counts Jesus — and following Him — as far more valuable than anything we already have.

"And Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.' And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed Him."

Luke 5:10–11

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For January 21

Explore the Bible

By Douglas K. Wilson, Ph.D.

Executive Director of the Center for Christian Calling, University of Mobile



PROTECT Genesis 9:1–15

This Lord's Day is designated as Sanctity of Human Life Sunday, reminding Southern Baptists of the barbaric practice of pre-born human sacrifice that was legally sanctioned in the United States by the Supreme Court in January 1973. Though *Roe v. Wade* has been reversed after 50 years, abortion remains a legal means of birth control in many states. This Sunday is a reminder that human life bears the image of God, is worthy of dignity and needs the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Blessing (1–4)

Be fruitful. Multiply. Fill the earth. Humanity receives instruction to have children and disperse across the land, just as they did in Genesis 1. Life is a blessing from God, and bearing children is the means of being fruitful and living beyond oneself. Noah and his wife are beyond childbearing years, but their sons and daughters-in-law will be fruitful. Their sons will be the forefathers of the tribes upon the earth (see Chapter 10).

Be feared. Evidently, animals did not fear men and women prior to the flood. The pairs of animals that entered the ark were gathered, not chased.

What happened that led to fear? Did the free-range chickens become fearful of becoming cooped up again? Prior to the ark experience, humans ate plants. Afterward, God allowed humanity to eat animals as well.

Be fed. No longer will humanity eat only vegetation. Now, creeping and crawling things, as well as flying and swimming things, are part of their menu. Blood, however, is not to be consumed. Eating blood is forbidden, and shedding the blood of other humans is also prohibited.

The Warning (5–7)

Be forewarned. Humans are accountable for bloodshed. Be-

cause we are made in God's image, we are answerable to God for murder and manslaughter.

These verses offer the first indication of "lex talionis" in Scripture. This may also be called "the law of just punishment" or "the punishment fits the crime."

Humans who take human life will be put to death, according to this passage.

This may be seen as vengeful, but this directive from God is actually a warning God is establishing capital punishment in His theocracy. Human life is sacred in that we each bear His image.

Later, in the Mosaic law, more instructions are provided for the tribes of Israel, the holy nation set apart to preserve His words and bear His name.

Those who reject God's authority by ignoring or intentionally transgressing His commandments invite His wrath upon themselves and their families (Ex. 20:5). This includes His instructions concerning the pre-born (Ex. 21:22–25).

The Covenant (8–15)

Be forever grateful. As descendants of Noah, everyone reading this lesson is a recipient of the covenant promise God made to Noah. Notice the covenant is not established or ratified by Noah and his sons.

The text reads: "My covenant," "covenant I am making," "covenant between Me and the earth," "the permanent covenant between God and all the living creatures" and "covenant that I have established."

God-initiated covenants are laid on the foundation of God's character. The sign of God's covenant with Noah is a rainbow. God keeps His promises.

The better sign is the cross. This is the promise of eternal life for all who trust Jesus.

Bible Studies for Life

By Rony Kozman, Ph.D.

Assistant professor of Biblical Studies, Samford University



A CRY FOR JUSTICE Psalm 10:1–4, 12–18

Sometimes it seems that injustice reigns. (1–4)

In this psalm, the psalmist is concerned with the injustice that is done to the lowly and to the weak. The psalmist is troubled that the wicked are oppressing the weak, the poor and the needy.

We read that the wicked "persecute the poor" (v. 2); "their mouths are filled with cursing and deceit and oppression" (v. 7); "they murder the innocent" (v. 8); like a predator they "watch for the helpless ... that they may seize the poor" (vv. 8–9).

The psalmist is disturbed in their quest to satisfy "the desires of their heart" (v. 3), the wicked seem to prosper while they perpetrate injustice (v. 5).

While unjustly amassing gain for themselves, the wicked think they will get away with their injustice. They say to themselves that "God will not seek it out" (v. 4). God's judgments are, to them "out of their sight" and they think they will not be punished (vv. 5–6).

The wicked think "God has forgotten" their injustice, that He will never find out about what they have done (v. 11) and that God "will not call [them] to account" (v. 13). They think they will get away.

The humble look to God for justice. (12–15)

But the psalmist knows injustice will only be here for a limited time. The psalmist pleads to God and asks Him why He is not intervening.

Why does He "stand far off" and not come to the aid of the poor? (v. 1) In fact, the entire psalm, including this question, is the psalmist's appeal to God that God would intervene and make things right.

The psalmist appeals to God to "rise up ... lift up your hand; do not forget the oppressed" (v. 12). And he pleads that God destroy the wicked who oppress the weak.

And he pleads that God would rid the earth of injustice (vv. 15–16).

The helpless along with the psalmist "commit themselves to [God]," trusting He will come to their aid (v. 14).

God will overthrow injustice. (16–18)

As much as the psalmist is distraught by the prosperity of the wicked at the expense of the weak and pleads for God to intervene, the psalmist also expresses trust and hope that God will intervene and make all things right.

Whereas the wicked claimed God "will never see" their injustice (v. 11), the psalmist confesses, "But you do see! Indeed, you note trouble and grief" (v. 14).

And because God sees the injustice done to the orphan and to the oppressed, God is their "helper;" and He will "do justice for" them (vv. 14, 18).

And the result is that in the future when God intervenes, when He rescues the weak and destroys the wicked, there will be no more terror and injustice in the earth (v. 18).

"The Lord is king forever and ever; the nations perish from his land. O Lord, you hear the desire of the afflicted; you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more."

Psalm 10:16–18

WORD search

- | | | |
|----------|----------|---------------|
| ALTAR | FRUITFUL | RAVEN |
| ANIMALS | HAM | REDEMPTION |
| ARK | HARVEST | SACRIFICE |
| BLESSING | JAPHETH | SHEM |
| COVENANT | MULTIPLY | SINFUL NATURE |
| CREATION | NIGHT | SONS |
| CURSE | NOAH | SUMMER |
| DOVE | OFFERING | TENT |
| DRY LAND | OLIVE | VINEYARD |
| FAMILY | RAIN | WATERS |
| FLOOD | RAINBOW | WORSHIP |

F L O O D E C I F I R C A S T
 G T H E R U T A N L U F N I S
 Z F N O F F E R I N G E C R R
 M T R Y W Y B T E N T R V E D
 T E D U L O R L W L E C M O K
 Z T H I I Y R H E A K M R H D
 F Z M S P T A S T S U L A J R
 D A L M R R F I H S S O M L R
 F K H D V W O U Q I N I T W H
 C R H E W N F K L Y P C N L B
 O L S Y X G M N E V A R T G R
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 N N I D L Z I N K L Q T I O N
 A Y G N Y I T T A X D L N S H
 N C M A E Z V M L R D A R W N
 T K B L J Y I E A U M N A K K
 A R K Y R N A I N K M T R H R
 R R N R A M N R H T E H P A J
 L R K D G B N J D R D N N M V
 B X K Y O N V P S G T K Y T Q
 L K Q W N O I T P M E D E R M

"Bring out all the living creatures that are with you — birds, livestock, those that crawl on the earth — and they will spread over the earth and be fruitful and multiply on the earth."

GENESIS 8:17

You Gotta' Hear This!



Finding humor in the everyday moments

A New Year's 'Revolution'

By **Barbara Eubanks**
The Alabama Baptist

Some people make New Year's resolutions — goals to improve in some way or to do better. Others make "New Year's Revolutions."

Our minister of music addressed this issue on the first Sunday morning of the new year. "I know many of you have made New Year's 'revolutions.'" When the laughter died down from his misspoken word, he corrected loudly, "Resolutions."

He may have been more correct the first time.

To repent of wrongdoings or bad habits means "to turn around and go the other direction." But often the turn is a 360 instead of a 180. A revolution just continues to turn like a revolving door. This was confirmed when one man stood and declared, "I have a bad temper, and when things go wrong, I'm bad to curse. I resolve to quit cursing this new year."

'Fill me up, Lord'

After the service, a friend approached him and asked, "Jack, didn't you make that same commitment last year?"

"Yes, and the year before that?"

"Why do you keep making the same resolution?"

"Because I haven't quit cursing yet."

That incident reminded me of the old fellow who would come to church only at revival time. Each year he would stand to testify and say, "Fill me up, Lord; fill me up."

One little fellow had heard that for several years. He said, "Don't do it, Lord; he leaks."

We had another lady in the church who was wishy-washy with her dedication. She would be spiritually hot for a while and then become very worldly.

One year at a time

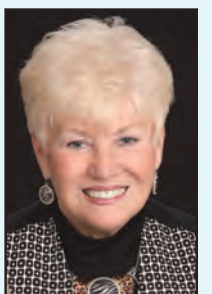
One Sunday she came forward at the invitation and said to my husband, "Brother Steve, you and everyone here know what I'm like. Sometimes I want to be an angel; others, I want to be a devil. I've made up my mind I'm going to be an angel this year."

She held to that commitment, but she knew herself too well; she only committed for a year at a time. We all may leak just a little bit. The Apostle Paul confessed to his struggle to always do what was right. What resolutions have you made in the past that you've kept? What are some that became revolutions?

May each of us first pray for the Holy Spirit to empower us to keep our promises this new year.

MEET THE AUTHOR

Barbara Eubanks of Albertville is an author, conference speaker, Christian humorist and retired English teacher. She is the widow of Baptist pastor Steve Eubanks.



MEDIA REVIEWS

By Leann Callaway

The Alabama Baptist

NewSong remains committed to connecting audiences to Christ

While performing concerts across the country, the contemporary Christian group NewSong remains committed to connecting audiences with Christ.

Throughout their 40-year musical journey, band members have heard numerous stories about how their music has inspired people to surrender their lives to Christ.

“You never know who is going to walk up to you and say something about how a song has impacted their life,” lead singer Russ Lee told *The Alabama Baptist*. “We’ve heard that some of our songs have encouraged people in the darkest time of their life.”

‘Light of hope’

“What we really want to do through our music is to shine a light of hope that will encourage people, point them in the right direction and let them know that God loves them and wants to rescue them.”

NewSong recently completed their “Very Merry Christmas Tour” with singer Jeremy Camp.

During concerts the group explained and emphasized to audiences their desperate need for a relationship with Christ, Lee said.

“When we take the stage, we want



NewSong

Photo courtesy of NewSong

to share a message about God’s unconditional love for His children, and the reason that He pursues us so passionately is because He loves us so completely.”

Desiring to increase their platform and ability to reach more audiences with the gospel, NewSong founded the Winter Jam Tour Spectacular in 1995. Featuring a variety of Christian artists in concerts together, Winter Jam has continued to be one of the most highly attended and anticipated tours across the country — even surpassing tours of secular artists, according to Pollstar Ticket-Sales Chart.

The 2024 tour kicks off in Alabama on Jan. 12 at the Mitchell Center in Mobile.

Through the years NewSong has

garnered prestigious honors including being inducted into the Georgia Music Hall of Fame. But despite all the accolades, the group keeps the spotlight shining on Christ.

Increasing awareness

They also have used their platform to increase awareness of a variety of missions organizations such as World Vision and Holt International.

“For us music has always been a tool to promote ministry,” Lee said.

“At our concerts we want people to know that there is a sense of hope and future in knowing Christ. Our desire is that God would allow us to take the gifts that He has given us and convey a message that gives people a glimpse of who He is and how wonderful it is to know Him.

“At the end of the day, our goal is that we don’t get in the way of the message. We simply set the table for the truth and reality of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

“At the end of the day, our goal is that we don’t get in the way of the message.”

Russ Lee
lead singer, NewSong

EDITOR’S NOTE

Reviews of films, books, music or other media that appear in TAB are intended to help readers evaluate current media for themselves, their children and grandchildren in order to decide whether to watch, read or listen. Reviews are not an endorsement by the writer or TAB Media.

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Bigger than basketball

By Roger Alford
The Christian Index

Coach puts focus on spiritual victories, ‘lives transformed’

Steve Edwards has built a successful women’s basketball program at Brewton-Parker College. He has been coach of the year in the Southern States Athletic Conference. He has also coached in three national tournaments.

But for Edwards, who doubles as campus pastor, all those accolades pale in comparison to the spiritual victories his teams have celebrated during his eight years as head coach in Mount Vernon, Georgia.

The names of all his players who have committed their lives to Christ during their time at Brewton-Parker have top billing on his office wall.

They’re listed above the All-American and All-Conference selections.

“For me, basketball is only a platform that God has given me to pour into the lives of young people,” Edwards said. “It’s much bigger than just winning basketball games. It’s about seeing lives transformed.”

Brewton-Parker President Steve Echols said the 33-year-old coach has seen more than 400 students make decisions for Christ since he arrived at Brewton-Parker in 2015.

More than 20 of those were on Sept. 5 when Edwards was preaching in a campus chapel service. At the end of the service, he gave an invitation to accept Christ, and a throng of students walked forward.

Dual giftedness

Echols recruited Edwards from Tennessee Temple University where he was serving as a graduate assistant. In the three years before Edwards arrived at Brewton-Parker, the Lady Barons had a record of three wins and 53 losses in the Southern



Photo courtesy of The Christian Index
Brewton-Parker College women’s basketball coach Steve Edwards gives instructions to Aaliyah Clay.

States Athletic Conference. Friends advised him not to take the job, but his love of a challenge attracted him.

“We had to start from the ground up,” Edwards said. “We began recruiting young ladies who would buy into what we are academically and spiritually.”

Echols said he quickly recognized Edwards’ giftedness both as a coach and as a minister, and after a year as the Brewton-Parker assistant women’s basketball coach, Edwards was

named head coach. He was 25 at the time, one of the youngest college head coaches in the nation.

Echols then appointed Edwards to the dual role of campus pastor.

Success has followed. Edwards was named Coach of the Year in the

Southern States Athletic Conference in the 2018–19 season. And, during his time at Brewton-Parker, his teams have played in the National Christian College Athletic Association tournament twice, finishing as runner-up in 2019, and in the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics last year.

Though the Lady Barons lost the national championship final, Edwards saw the season as an “overwhelming success.”

“On that particular team, eight young ladies had come to know Christ that year,” he said. “That’s bigger than any national championship we could win.

“God has been opening up doors for my wife and I to pour into these

young ladies spiritually,” he said.

Edwards said he feels his teams have done well because they put God first.

“To date, we’ve had 26 young ladies who came here not knowing Christ but who came to know Him. To me, that’s the reason we’ve seen success. That’s the reason we’ve been able to consistently compete for a Top 4 spot in this conference.”

While Edwards loves coaching, he loves ministry more.

“My primary role is campus pastor, and everything else falls second to that on campus,” he said. “The spiritual welfare of our young people means everything to me. I live on campus. The students know my wife and I are available to them 24/7. I don’t consider this work. I enjoy it that much.”

So does his wife, Carlena, a teacher at a middle school near Brewton-Parker, and so do their two daughters, Landyn and Makaliah.

All-American point guard Madison Evans said her coach has not only made her a better athlete but a better person.

Walking the walk

“He helped me get a clear understanding of who Jesus is,” Evans said. “He taught me to pray. He baptized me.”

Every practice, Evans said, begins with a Bible study. Every game begins with a team prayer.

Now a senior and team captain, Madison Evans, has adopted her coach’s philosophy.

“My walk with the Lord is more important than the victories or the awards,” she said.

Brewton-Parker is affiliated with the Georgia Baptist Convention.

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MAKE DISCIPLES

One key step to spark evangelism in your life

By **Chuck Lawless**

chucklawless.com

Even those of us who minister in God's church often struggle with doing personal evangelism.

We know we need to do it, but it's not always easy to connect with non-believers and share the gospel with them. So, we turn to programs to help us jump-start this process.

I'm not opposed to programs; in fact, I've seen good programs that equip believers to evangelize. At the same time, though, I don't want us to miss a simple, basic step that can charge our evangelistic efforts.

Paul's writings

To see that step, I turn to two of the apostle Paul's writings to hear his requests for prayer from other believers:

▶ "Pray also for me, that the message may be given to me when I open my mouth to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel. For this I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I might be bold enough to speak about it as I should" (Eph. 6:19–20).

▶ "At the same time, pray also for us that God may open a door to us for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains, so that I may make it known as I should" (Col. 4:3–4).

This was the apostle extraordinaire admitting by his request that he needed God's help to evangelize. He needed boldness and clarity, and he knew God alone would open doors for him to share. Thus, he asked believers to pray for him.

My point is really simple: if Paul needed ongoing prayer to do evangelism, I suspect all of us do, too.

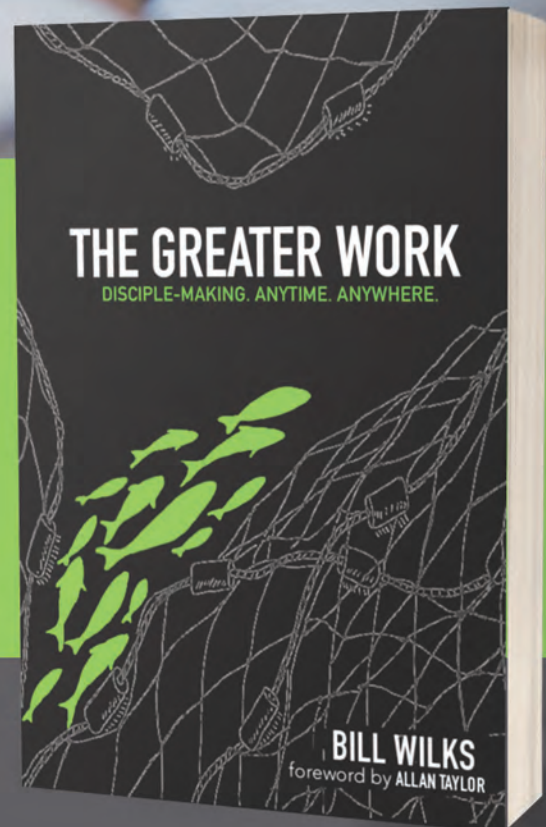
If you want to evangelize more, ask some church members to pray for you — for boldness, clarity and opportunity — and give them permission to hold you accountable for your evangelistic efforts. Prayer + accountability can make a big difference.

EDITOR'S NOTE — This story was originally published by chucklawless.com.

"PRAY THAT I MIGHT BE BOLD ENOUGH TO SPEAK ABOUT IT AS I SHOULD." — EPHESIANS 6:20

d+life

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‘Time is short’

By Myriah Snyder
International Mission Board

IMB missionary reflects on final conversations with dying man in Southeast Asia

International Mission Board missionary Nathaniel Creed stood at the bedside of Henry, a devout Muslim in Southeast Asia. He’d spent the last five years sharing the gospel and his life with the man. Now, Henry was dying of cancer. It was in his small intestine and spreading.

As Nathaniel visited the declining Henry in his home, he took the opportunity to share the biblical story of the paralytic man whose friends took him through the roof of a house to see Jesus.

“I told him, ‘Henry, God can do that for you. Jesus can do that for you, too. If you’ll believe in Jesus, He can forgive you and heal you,’” Nathaniel recounted.

“You know Nathaniel, right now I’ll take any prayer,” Henry responded. This man, hostile to the gospel and all things Christian, allowed this Western Christian to pray over him in Jesus’ name.

“I’m in a desperate way,” he confessed.

Bonding over fishing

Before he’d been diagnosed with cancer, the two became friends, bonding over their shared fishing hobby.

Nathaniel and Elizabeth Creed, along with their five children, live in a predominantly Muslim culture in Southeast Asia. Over a million people live in their area.

For the last six years, the Creeds have been the only IMB missionaries among them.

The people there are set in their religion. Secret police seek out those who are trying to proselytize.

The government is run by those who adhere to sharia law. While it’s



IMB photo

permissible to be a Christian in this area, it is not legal to be a national and a Christian.

The overwhelming majority of the population is lost.

Most have never heard the gospel. And for those who have, openly sharing comes at a great cost. Even the area itself is hard to access, off the beaten path.

But the Creed family planted their lives among these people. Nathaniel started a fishing club, and he found it was a fantastic way to connect with people.

Through this club, Nathaniel met Henry. While the two men immediately bonded over their love of fishing, Henry was hostile to Nathaniel’s religion. He believed, as most devout Muslims in his region do, that Christianity brought no good with it. Christianity is viewed there

as “the great Satan,” and American Christians are perceived as bringing with them Western culture, riddled with pornography, alcohol use and all sorts of vices.

Nathaniel was Henry’s first Christian friend. Over the years, Nathaniel used their fishing excursions to share a few stories from Creation to Christ.

He shared other stories too, highlighting New Testament truths about love and justice for his very moral, yet very lost Muslim friend.

“I’m always mad at you,” Henry said.

“Every time I go to mosque and pray after we fish, I have to pray five times in order to get my anger away from you.”

Something about Nathaniel’s faith unsettled Henry.

Yet, for five years their friendship persisted, bound by their shared love of fishing.

Their conversations shifted to deeper topics about life and marriage and all the tough stuff that comes along, such as cancer.

That afternoon in Henry’s home, Nathaniel prayed openly for his healing and for him to come to faith, all in Jesus’ name. Two months later, Henry was in the hospital, his body withering away. He couldn’t eat. He wasn’t even healthy enough to undergo surgery.

Near the end

Nathaniel knew Henry’s time on this earth was ending. He prayed for God to help him communicate with Henry all the things he had on his heart in their next meeting.

A week later, Nathaniel shared that the man’s “time is short,” and the gospel was the only thing he needed. Nathaniel expressed his love to the man and asked to pray with him again.

“He rejected Christ in those moments, but he took a step forward,” Nathaniel said, his voice cracking. Two days later, Henry died. As far as Nathaniel knows, Henry rejected Christ.

There are still more in his fishing club who have heard the gospel and need to accept it, Nathaniel said.

He encourages Southern Baptists who hear this story to not be discouraged but to consider if God is calling them to reach the nations.

EDITOR’S NOTE — Names have been changed for security reasons.

This story was originally published by the International Mission Board.

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